1: Mi Mi Khaing I-5 (no date) 1946 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

FOREWORD

● 114 I wrote this book in Delhi early in 1945 when Burma was still guarded by the Japanese invader. Its inspiration, therefore, was nostalgia and memories, instead of the surging life of my native environment which would have enabled these slight five thousand lines to carry with more strength the growth and the spirit of three generations in Burma. In offering the present result to readers outside Burma, I would have them be guided by the weighty verdict of my solemn friend U. Thein Tin, who is known to the Burmese reading public as "The Dark Emerald" for the fanciful play of his pen. He returned me my manuscript with the words "You have done what you can. It is for posterity to do better."

When a Burmese word is first introduced in the book it is printed in Italics and thereafter in Roman type. At the end of the book (p. 132) will be found a Glossary of such words, with page references to their first appearance in the text. A few Proper names are included in the Glossary with page references to explanations which may help the reader.

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
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212 194 The scientific men write bhoora (lord), the Burman pronounces the word păyah; tsit-tshay (ghost) is a formidable way of reproducing the spoken tăsay; pa-nya (learning) but inadequately represents the sound of pyinya; khwon (taxes) is a startling, not to say puzzling, way of suggesting the sound kohn. The matter is made none the easier by the difficulty of finding an English equivalent at all for some Burmese sounds. In the words nyaung, pyouk, gyi, and the like, the *y* belongs to the preceding letter, and has always the consonantal and never the vowel sound. Such words are therefore invariably monosyllables. Again, the nou'pyit sound, which I have written *è* on the analogy of the French *mère*, has as a final vocable no equivalent in English. *Errant* gives the force as an initial letter. The scientific form of *eh* is certainly misleading. The initial *ky* is a great crux to beginners in Burmese. It requires a fine ear to catch the precise sound. An English officer will call for his clerk, Maung Poh Chè, and the punkah-boy will pass on the word for Maung Poh Kyè—tyè it might almost be written. But it is little use multiplying instances. Suffice it to add that a final consonant is always silent—strangled is almost a literal translation of the Burmese word.

● 114 Of published works on Burma I have found those of Colonel Yule, Captain Forbes, and Dr. Bastian most valuable in supplying hints as to those of the national customs most likely to be interesting to foreigners. Had Captain Forbes's life been prolonged this book would probably have had no *raison d'être*.

000 In conclusion, I have only to record my indebtedness to the Rev. Dr. Marks, the head of the S.P.G. in Burma. For over twenty years he has laboured in Burma both as a teacher and a missionary, and there is no Burman in the

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585 369 with which he intends to set up house: a bundle of mats, a long arm-chair, a teak box, mattresses, pillows, besides materials for the feast and presents for the bride. The people who have put up the string — called the gold or silver cord — usually young men intent on a jollification of their own, stop the happy man, and threaten to break the string with a curse on the married couple unless some money is given them. It is simple extortion, and English district officers sometimes forbid it. Nevertheless the speculation is usually successful. I suppose no one feels very niggardly on his marriage day.

585 The other custom is much more singular, more ancient, and infinitely more disagreeable. On the night of the marriage a band of the young bachelors of the place come and shower stones and sticks on the roof of the house where the happy couple are, keeping up sometimes such a sustained battery that the thatch or wooden shingles suffer materially, while the furniture and even the newly-wedded couple occasionally do not escape injury. In Lower Burma the lads are usually bought off with a sum of money, and where the officials do not interfere to prevent it, the custom has degenerated into a system of extortion. Not a few lawsuits have sprung out of such sieges. The money paid in toll to this horseplay goes by the name of ké-bo, and is supposed to be devoted by the receivers to making offerings at the pagoda, but the young men nowadays use it shamelessly for their own entertainment. In Upper Burma the 585 114 blackmail is never demanded, and consequently Father San Germano was puzzled to conceive any reason for the extraordinary practice. Captain Forbes seeing the payment to procure relief, believed that extortion was the sole origin as well as object of the performance. But the learned in Burmese folk-lore assign it a much higher and more estimable beginning. When, after the world was formed, it was first peopled from the superior heavens of the Byammās, of the nine that remained behind, weighed down by the gross earthly food they had eaten, five gradually became men and four women. When these Byammā-gyi ko-yauk, these nine great ancestors of the Burmese and of all mankind, had gradually degenerated, through the substitution of Pada-

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CHAPTER XXXIX

LUCKY AND UNLUCKY DAYS

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IT has come to be considered an axiom that the Burmese are irredeemably lazy. Some authors who have written about the country ascribe a very great number of additional bad qualities to them; others are more favourable; but all are unanimous in the declaration that they are lazy. The reverend missioner, Father San Germano, who was almost the first European to write a definite account of Burma, is the most unkind critic of all. He gathered together a great deal of information about the country during his long residence, but the opinion he formed of the people would be crushing were it not so strongly at variance with that expressed by a Christian priest who has been still longer in Burma, and whose knowledge of everything connected with it yields to none, the late Bishop Bigandet. But it is as well to see ourselves as others see us. The good father says: "The Burmese are distinguished for that timidity and servility which is the characteristic of slaves. . . . There is no contempt, oppression, or injustice they will not exercise towards their fellow-men when they can assure themselves of the protection of government. They are thus vile and abject in adversity, but arrogant and presumptuous in prosperity. There is no one amongst them, however mean, who does not aim at the dignity of mandarin (minister)." But the chief characteristic of the Burmese "is an incorrigible idleness. Instead of employing their time in improving their possessions, they prefer to give themselves up to an indolent repose; to spend the day in talking, smoking, and chewing betel, or else to become the satellites of some powerful

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
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mandarin. The same hatred of labour leads to an excessive love of cunning, and also to thieving, to which they are much addicted. . . . It would seem that it is impossible for this people to tell the truth; nay, a person who ventures to do it is called a fool, a good kind of man, but not fitted for managing his affairs." Still the padre has a little good to say of them: "Besides giving daily alms to their talapoins, they all lay by something to be applied to some sort of public benefit. They are very fond of thus signalising their generosity, and will often deprive themselves of comforts to have the pleasure of being benefactors to the public." This is an unlovely picture. But the good father was apparently very unfortunate in his acquaintances.

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It is pleasant after this to turn to a soldier's opinion. Major Grant Allen says: "Unlike the generality of Asiatics, the Burmese are not a fawning race. They are cheerful, and singularly alive to the ridiculous; buoyant, elastic, soon recovering from personal or domestic disaster. Free from the prejudices of caste or creed, they readily fraternise with strangers, and at all times frankly yield to the superiority of the European. . . . Indifferent to the shedding of blood on the part of their rulers, yet not individually cruel; temperate, abstemious, and hardy, but idle, with neither fixedness of purpose nor perseverance. Discipline, or any continued employment, becomes most irksome to them, yet they are not devoid of a certain degree of enterprise."

This is a much better certificate, but still we are accused of laziness. Let us now turn to the last and the best authority on the subject (from an English point of view), Colonel Horace Browne, at one time Commissioner of Pegu, and always very popular with the Burmese. The Burman, he says, "displays much spasmodic energy and general laziness, much love of feasts and shows, much disregard of the sacredness of human life, and much tenderness for the lives of inferior members of the animal kingdom, much arrogance and inconsiderateness when placed in high position, and last, though not least, much general truthfulness, and, amongst unsophisticated villagers, the very unoriental trait of being unable to tell a specious falsehood."

The hauteur complained of towards strangers is princi-

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pally due to the fact that the stranger is not a Buddhist, and has not as a boy been admitted into a monastery. To a Burman such a man is no better than a buffalo or a dog. In those of low degree this feeling shows itself in pitying kindness, in those in high positions in arrogance and insulting rudeness.

The unpleasant allegations of Father San Germano may be considered cancelled by the advocacy of the two military gentlemen, but there remains the united charge of unwarrantable laziness. Let us see what can be said for the defence on this point.

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It may be taken for granted that the whole human race is more or less hampered by a dislike for work when there is no necessity for doing it. In addition to sharing this weakness, the Burman is fettered by a multiplicity of fortunate and unfortunate days. When he is born, his sadā, or horoscope, is cast, detailing minutely the moment at which he appeared, and the influence the presiding constellation has over him personally; and this sadā must be carefully examined before anything can be done. But beyond this there are a great variety of unlucky days which more or less concern everybody, and have to be avoided if a man is to hope for success in his enterprise or his journey. To enlist the sympathy of maritime England, I will begin with the superstition about Friday:

Thaukkya ye gyaung
Ma thwa kaung.

On Friday boats sailing
Cause weeping and wailing.

On the contrary, if you begin the study of a subject on Friday you will become an authority on it. Thursday is also a good day; but if you commence on Tuesday or Saturday you will soon die. Saturday is a bad day for everything, especially for fires—a fact which the Fire Brigade would probably corroborate. But doubtless it is somewhat irritating for an Englishman when he wants to commence a journey, and has everything ready except the bullocks for the cart, to find that he cannot persuade his servants to buy or engage them till Sunday, because such a proceeding would

13: Khin Zaw 1-5 (no date) 1940 AP1 Burma
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BURMESE MUSIC.

(*A Preliminary Enquiry*).

"Just at the moment, when western civilization is beginning to realise that oriental music is something better than the barbaric noise it has long thought it to be, the oriental nations are in grave danger of losing interest in it, and as it has been conveyed from generation to generation not by the arts of writing and printing, but orally, so soon as that interest is gone the art itself, unless special measures are taken, will have entirely evaporated—that is, will be forever un-recoverable. One would wish East and West to study one another's music, whilst pursuing independent courses in their own, but that seems to be impossible."

PERCY A. SCHOLES,
Oxford Companion to Music, p. 672,
O. U. P. 1938.

Part I. Classics, Legend and History.

Burmese music is a virgin field for research. Nobody can bewail this virginity more than myself. To help me there does not seem to exist a single western work on Burmese music though there are such classics as Fox Strangways' on Indian and J. H. Levis' on Chinese music. Many writers on Burma have passed remarks, kind or humorous, on Burmese music. But few have attempted a technical study of it. Nothing Burmese escaped the notice of Sir James George Scott of course. But I know of only two who left some technical remarks on Burmese music: Paul Edmonds, the author of *Peacocks and Pagodas*; and P. A. Mariano, in an appendix on Burmese music to that most lovingly produced book *Burma* by Max and Bertha Ferrars. I shall discuss the observations of both by and by[1]. I draw attention to this paucity of reference material to prove that I cannot be well informed and therefore cannot speak with authority on the subject.

It is fitting to begin with a translation of what has already been written on Burmese music in the Burmese language. If it is unscientific it is at least what the Burmese have to say about it. And I shall be lacking in veneration for the Burmese classics if I neglect the following extracts. They are published in U San Win's admirable effort to preserve Burmese classical tunes in his specially invented system of notation, entitled *Burmese Music Notes* Book No. 1. တူရေးသွင် ဧရာဝတီ အဓိပတိနတ်မင်း ဦးဆွန်း ဆုတ်ခမ်းသစ် ၁၀၀ I must draw public attention to this and a second book which came out recently; because, in spite of their naivety in the technique of notation, they nevertheless mark the beginnings of a systematisation of Burmese music by a Burmese lover of music. It is a labour of love; and

1. In 1939 appeared *Die Musik Birmas* by Kurt Reinhard. But it is an ethnological work on the music of Burma and what recognisable Burmese music there is in it is taken from Mariano.

114 533 very considerable the labour must have been. Experts in western notation who may be disposed to smile at the *Burmese Music Notes* will realise notwithstanding that here at last are the authentic classical tunes of the Burmese put on record in black and white, ready, and if desired, easy enough to be transcribed into western notation after a perusal of this article and its supplement 'The writing of Burmese music.'

534 114 In the second book of U San Win is appended most valuable and authentic information on the fundamentals of Burmese music, such as, the tuning of the Burmese harp (စောင်းတော်), its history; the tuning of the drum-circle (ဆင်ဖန်း); the gong-circle (ကြိမ်ဝိုင်း); the ခ *Hnè* (Burmese oboe), big and small; and the succession of Burmese keys. The word 'key' will arouse sudden interest. It will become very interesting indeed in due course. To begin with the classics:—

533 773 "*Preface*:—From the beginning of the world, during the sovereignty of the first President King the five principal sounds of bass, string, percussion, wind and clapper, had been employed in music in ceremonies of sprinkling the holy water all over the world.

"Three hundred years before Buddha's Enlightenment, when, to avoid the enmity of Pañcala Rājā, the Sakya kings of Kapilavatthu, Devadaha and Koliya left the middle regions (Majjhimadesa) and founded the Tagaung kingdom of Sankassarattha, the same five kinds of instruments were wont to supply music for auspicious Royal occasions and entertainments.

"Also, during the life-time of Lord Buddha, according to *Sakkapañha Sutta*, deva Pañcasikhā, the wearer of five top-knots, renowned the Lord in song playing the seven times seven (49) melodic figures of *Cita pluta* on his celestial harp, which was said to be three-quarters of a *yojana* (*i.e.*, about 2¼ miles)[1] in length, called Beluva-pañdu-vina.

"The Buddhist anchorite Nārada of the middle regions compiled the treatise *Naradasikkha* from musicology as known to all learned ones from the beginning. In it was mentioned the same seven times seven (49) melodic figures (*tāna*) and three times seven (21) modes (*mucchanā*) which are mentioned in *Sakkapañha Sutta*.

"In the chronicle of Buddha are descriptions of how, when he was seated on the invincible throne Aparājita the devas came and paid homage with musical instruments; and how, on the occasion of His departure from their abode, Tāvatimsa to visit Sankassa Nagara, they followed in His wake proclaiming His excellence in music and song.

"After the death of Lord Buddha, too, in the history of the middle regions, the Buddhist nobility and gentry practised music on various instruments, classifying and utilising various kinds of sounds.

"In the history of our Buddhist country of Burma, music and musical instruments existed throughout the successive kingdoms of Tagaung, Srikhettara, Pagan, Myinsaing, Sagaing, Pinya, Ava, Konbaung, Amarapūra, down to Ran. pūra Mandalay.

1. Authorities differ on the exact measurement of *Yojanā*.

13: Khin Zaw I-5 (no date) 1940 AP1 Burma
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BURMESE MUSIC.

A feeble musician, Musila (မုသိလ) of Ujjeni, whose music on the *vina* was 'like scratching on a mat,' came to learn of Guttila (ဂုတ္တိလ) of Benares (the Bodhisatta). Guttila's parents when they heard him said "Shoo! Shoo! the rats are gnawing the *vina* to pieces". Guttila who, as Bodhisatta, was 'skilled in discerning from the lineaments of the body' said 'Go my son, this art is not for you.' But Musila got his way; and Guttila, the Bodhisatta who did not stint his knowledge, at last pronounced his pupil perfect. Musila pressed to be taken into the king's service. This was done; but the king awarded Guttila twice as much as his pupil. Musila protested, and forced matters to a contest, of which proclamation was made to tuck of drum. The Bodhisatta reflected that he was old, and that 'if he beats me, death in the wood is better than the shame which will be my portion.' So to the woods he went; but 'kept returning through fear of death, and going back to the wood for fear of shame,' so that 'the grass died as he walked and his feet wore away a path.' In his trouble Sakka, the king of gods, appeared. Guttila was to break, in the contest, one string after another, beginning at the 'beestring' and the music should be as good as before. 'Then you shall go on playing with nothing but the body; and from the ends of the broken strings the sound shall go forth and fill all the land of Benares for the space of twelve leagues.' All happened as was foretold, and the scholar, beaten out of the field, was stoned and torn in pieces by the populace..."

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. . . . . .

So far the classics. Yet it appears that in the music itself there is as much evidence (if not more) of Chinese and Siamese influence as there is of ancient Indian influence in literature. I hope these influences will receive the attention of researchers in Burmese history.

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As far as I am aware the Chinese influence seems to be the oldest. An unspoilt Burmese ear will catch Chinese cadences in any extemporization on the black keys of the piano in the truly old Burmese style. But that is no evidence. I quote J. Kunst[1].

"....This being granted, Prof. von Hornbostel has made a very important discovery, that the scales of very different civilizations and peoples are derived from this ancient Chinese cycle of blown fifths. All these scales are composed of a series of notes, ordinarily 5 or 7, which follow each other in the cycle in some kind of regular fashion.

1. *De l'Origine des Echelles Musicales Javano-Balinaises.* Conference faite le 7 Janvier 1929 à l'Institut Colonial d'Amsterdam. *In* Journal of the Siam Society, Vol. XXIII, pt., pp. 115-116. Translated by G.

13: Khin Zaw I-5 (no date) 1940 AP1 Burma
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> ....Nowadays in certain localities of China, the performance of music has come to be looked down on as a menial and unscholarly vocation.... although this aversion is not universal in China, music has been intellectually neglected for a long time. As a result music has become unmusical in China. And this in turn has increased the contempt in which it is held by the educated classes. It is a vicious circle."..... 533 171 175

I would not have allowed myself to be thus catapulted into the problem of the Burmese scale were it not so necessary to emphasise the very sharp line of demarcation between classical evidence and musical evidence. Too long have we taken shelter behind the façade of ancient Indian culture. [1143]

With regard to the most important real evidence of the written records, what have we to rely on? Only one MS in *parabeik* form—သရဘေ *Naralikha*. U San Win himself pointed out that no other Burmese work on Burmese music had ever been known to exist. Until one has seen that *parabeik* one would be foolish to talk about the Burmese scale with any conviction. The best that can be done is to proceed from the known to the unknown and talk of clues rather than discoveries.

If it were possible, a scientific survey of the principal Burmese musical instruments should establish the one Burmese scale which is common to the whole country, or rather to which all the scales all over the country approximate. Everything about us is approximate. Our tunes, having no notation, are always at variance. Western people talk of our lack of method. Yet..... 533 183

> " The elements of tone and rhythm have been combined and recombined, and have left the theory a tangled mass of forgotten systems and the practice an ineradicable instinct. The veneration for the past because of its remoteness, the mental attitude which looks away from the categories of time and space and turns its attention upon the essence of the thing itself, the faith which links the present closely with the time when the gods walked the earth and still points to the visible imprints of their feet—all these have united to personify every element of their music, and piously to preserve names and attitudes which have long lost their meaning; so that much of the theory is clear only to those who can read myth. Nor on the practical side has extemporization, as it is understood, been learned in a day, nor even in the life-time of any individual.....But it is age-long practice rather than memory which has placed at the command of the best singers that inexhaustible wealth of variation with which they make a melody their own, that gift of improvisation which takes on an epic quality, as all crafts do that are handed down from father to son. To walk on the Old Trunk Road is, it has been said, to step into a chapter of Genesis; and in the same way we catch, in these immemorial cadences, the very spirit of the rhapsodists of Homer. Their music is old, but with an age like the eternal youth of Greece, not with a second childhood like the stereotyped formulas of the Troubadours."[1]

1. Fox Strangways' Introduction to *Music of Hindostan*.

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Now comes the time to discuss the technical remarks of Mr. Paul Edmonds and Mr. P. A. Mariano mentioned at the beginning of this article. In Chap. VII of his *Peacocks and Pagodas* (Routledge, 1924) Paul Edmonds says:

> Hla Tin having fixed up his mandolin proceeded to play me a tune. The tune, he said, was the introduction to the "baw lè," and the "baw lè" is the tune to which all songs of a sad and plaintive character are commonly sung—though there is nothing about the tune that sounds sad to the western ears[1]. The short introduction was in two parts, the lower being a kind of rough counterpoint[2]. It is played at the beginning, between every verse, and at the end. I wrote it down on paper in western notation after several repetitions, (*See* Example 4), and upon examining the upper part, or tune, was interested to find that it was apparently in the pentatonic scale. I then successfully transcribed the "baw lè" tune proper, (*See* Example 6), but this was, I found, approximately in our ordinary major scale, and it was difficult to say for certain whether or not the tune had originally been pentatonic[3].

Paul Edmonds also examined the xylophone (*pattalar*), the drum-circle (*saingwaing*), and the gong-circle (*kyi-waing*) and said:

> The pattala, which seemed to be in the key of C, had an eight-note scale; but at first I was puzzled to classify it, since in the upper octave the note B was nearer to B-flat than to B-natural, whereas in the lower octave it was the other way about. How to account for an approximate B-flat in one octave and an approximate B-natural in the octave in the same instrument was a problem[4]. The note F in both octaves was indeterminate. It seemed to be about midway between F and F-sharp[5].
>
> This first suggested to me what I now believe to be the true explanation, which is that the pentatonic scale is the foundation and that notes have been roughly inserted in the two gaps between E and G and between A and C in order to make the scale approximate to the Western major scale. I was not sure of this at that time, but subsequent investigations confirmed it.

I wish Paul Edmonds had left a full account of his investigations. It would be a real service not only to future research but also to Burmese music. While heartily agreeing with him that the pentatonic scale was the foundation of the Burmese scale, I hesitate

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1. No wonder. Hla Tin has spoilt the plaintive part of the tune with a variation: (*See* Example 7) the last beat of the third bar leading down to the tonic in the beginning of the bar following. These five notes are characteristic of the *baw-lè* cadence, and of the original Burmese tonality. Harmonically, they form the arpeggio of the tonic major chord with added sixth like the arpeggio ending to Grieg's *To the Spring* in F-sharp major.

2. P.E. apparently here refers to Hla Tin's thumb work. When playing the mandolin a Burman does not use the plectrum. Forefinger and thumb are employed, the latter to strike an occasional lower octave or the Fourth or the Fifth, or to help the forefinger along with the melody. The result perhaps often sounds like rough counterpoint. But the tune was certainly not in two parts. The division is of labour, not thematic.

[118] [175] 3. It could not be. *Banlè* is a very much later invention attributed to Hlaing-Htetk-Khaung-Tin (1855-1875 A.D.) an excellent summary of whose life translated by Nyi Nyi from the excellent series of short biographies of famous Burmese authoresses by Ma Ma Gyi, appeared in the *World of Books* Nos. 136-137. U Thein Han (Zaw Gyi) points out the germ of the *baw-lè* tune in the concluding part of a *patpyo* "ya-gon-myaing-gyar" attributed by some to Myawadiwungyi and by others to Hlaing-Htetk-Khaung-Tin's own mother Ma Mya Gale.

4. I would blame its maker. My *pattalar* reveals just the opposite.

5. It is still there.

BURMESE MUSIC.

533 [114] In appendix C to *Burma* by Max and Bertha Ferrars (Low, Marston, 1900) Mr. Mariano says :

> The fundamental pitch-note of Burmese music corresponds to our A-natural. Three kinds of scales are used. The first is the Doric scale consisting of the first, second, fifth, sixth and eighth intervals of the diatonic scale...

In example 7, I have drawn attention to the last beat of the third bar, which, with the first note in the bar following formed the C - E - G - A - C cadence so familiar to our ears. Unless Mr. Mariano meant the third instead of the second interval mentioned above, I am ignorant of the Doric scale he spoke of. In fact I have floundered among the Greek scales and the ecclesiastical modes of Europe in the hope of finding a short-cut to an explanation of the unchromatic Burmese scale. I fight shy of comparing the Burmese scale with the old modes of the West.

Mariano :

> The second is the Burmese diatonic scale, in which however, the Seventh is tuned flat by about a quarter tone. There are no flats or sharps in the Burmese gamut. Nevertheless changes of keys are not infrequent in their melodies. These invariably proceed from the tonic to the sub-dominant but without the introduction of the seventh flat, as there is no regular system of counterpoint. Here the advantage of tuning the Seventh somewhat flat is apparent, for it does duty as the Fourth interval of the new key. A change from the tonic to the dominant also sometimes takes place.

Mr. Mariano does not mention if it does so without the fourth sharp. Yet so it does by the help of the half-sharp Fourth which does duty as the Seventh of the new key. Mariano :

> The third scale is a kind of minor; it consists of the same notes as the major diatonic scale but it begins and ends with the third interval..

533 536 This scale is strictly speaking only a mode, the modes of the mediant (*see* Example 11*a*). There seems to be also the modes of the dominant and the sub-dominant (*See* Examples 9 and 10). Oddly enough the E-mode, which Mr. Mariano describes as a kind of minor[1], is commonly used in the happy lovemaking scenes [illegible] *hnitpathwa* in *pwès* where the Prince and the Princess dance and sing in this E-mode till, after about two hours, troth has been plighted and, in the final bar of the last song, the voice without stopping at the temporary keynote E holds it for a moment and then slides *via* D down to the real old tonic C; this descent being the signal that the scene has ended. Mr. Stewart describes the scene better :

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1. "The Greek mode beginning with E was supposed to have manly and vigorous qualities."—R. T. White in *Music and its Story*.

14: Brant E-5 (1949-50) 1954 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

V

INTRODUCTION

101 This paper is a summary report of field research which I conducted in the
122 village of Tadagale, Insein District, Burma, during the period November, 1949, to April, 1950. The work was made possible by a scholarship under the Fulbright Program, supplemented by an Area Research Training Fellowship granted by the Social Science Research Council. I am indebted to both of these organizations for the support of my work.

114 A word seems in order concerning the selection of Tadagale as a community
121 for study. It was my original intention, before I reached Burma and learned in detail of the then prevailing conditions, to do fieldwork among the Burmese of the delta or dry zone, using as a base a single village which would more or less exemplify contemporary Burmese peasant culture. Nothing was more impossible, in view of the internal conditions, and the plan had to be abandoned. After several months of efforts to shift my research to the Shan States, during which time one project had to be abandoned before it actually commenced, and another came to an abrupt halt in its second week -- both because of the spread of the internal disturbances to the areas concerned -- it became clear that the greatest assurance of continuity of research was to be found in the general area near Rangoon. After a brief survey of communities within a few miles radius of the capital, Tadagale was chosen. It appeared most suitable for several reasons, among them accessibility, manageable size, and, owing to its contacts with Rangoon, the possibility of studying socio-cultural change.

124 The fieldwork was done by interviewing of informants, by direct observation of events and behavior, and by the compilation of a detailed census concerning household membership, occupations, marital status, religious affiliation, group membership, income, and other matters. With the aid of a fluent, college-educated interpreter fieldwork was carried on daily.

114 This paper does not purport in any way to be a complete or definitive
121 study. An approximation to such a report, I am convinced, can result only from fieldwork done under a set of conditions very different from those that were possible for the research here reported. These should include extended continuous residence (minimally one year) in the community by the investigator, and participation by him in community life without self-imposed or assumed separateness or distinction from the people; and a command of the native language adequate to conduct interviews and conversations without the use of interpreters. For Southeast Asia especially, the real fulfillment of such conditions is most difficult, but to the extent that they are met in ethnographic work the material obtained will possess richness and depth. Since, for a variety of reasons, these conditions could not be met in my study of Tadagale, no apology is offered for the inadequacies of this report. It is well, however, in these days of studies of 'cultures from afar' and other short-cut methods of fieldwork, to indicate how we have worked and how our results are thereby affected. Since knowledge of contemporary Burmese village culture is virtually non-existent, a report such as this perhaps may be regarded as a small contribution towards filling a large void.

[127] I am much indebted to Miss C. A. Rustom, of Mandalay, my interpreter,
114 whose tact and insight certainly minimized the limitations that are inherent
122 in fieldwork done by means of an interpreter. Dr. Paul F. Cressey of Wheaton College (Massachusetts), who was teaching in Rangoon University at the time of

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my fieldwork, gave helpful suggestions and advice.. The greatest thanks are doubtless due the people of Tadagale. At a time when their own problems of living were unusually difficult, they were friendly and cooperative towards one who must, at times, have seemed a quite aimless and overly inquisitive outsider. To Professor Lauriston Sharp of Cornell University I am grateful for making it possible for me to spend part of my time during the spring term of 1951 in the organization of data embodied in this report; and no less appreciative of his forbearance in the face of my unusual tardiness in getting the report written.

Charles S. Brant

Easton, Maryland
January, 1954

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PREFACE

IN most of the quotations from Burmese books containing the life of the Buddha I am indebted, if not for the exact words, yet for the sense, to Bishop Bigandet's translation.

I do not think I am indebted to anyone else. I have, indeed, purposely avoided quoting from any other book and using material collected by anyone else.

The story of Ma Pa Da has appeared often before, but my version is taken entirely from the Burmese song. It is, as I have said, known to nearly every Burman.

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(1)

THE SOUL OF A PEOPLE

CHAPTER I

LIVING BELIEFS

'The observance of the law alone entitles to the right of belonging to my religion.'—*Saying of the Buddha.*

FOR the first few years of my stay in Burma my life was so full of excitement that I had little care or time for any thought but of to-day. There was, first of all, my few months in Upper Burma in the King's time before the war, months which were full of danger and the exhilaration of danger, when all the surroundings were too new and too curious to leave leisure for examination beneath the surface. Then came the flight from Upper Burma at the time of the war, and then the war itself. And this war lasted four years. Not four years of fighting in Burma proper, for most of the Irrawaddy valley was peaceful enough by the end of 1889; but as the central parts quieted down, I was sent to the frontier, first on the North and then on the East by

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114 the Chin Mountains; so that it was not until 1890 that a transfer to a more settled part gave me quiet and opportunity for consideration of all I had seen and known. For it was in those years that I gained most of whatever little knowledge I have of the Burmese people.

Months, very many months, I passed with no one to speak to, with no other companions but Burmese. I have been with them in joy and in sorrow, I have fought with them and against them, and sat round the camp-fire after the day's work and talked of it all. I have had many friends amongst them, friends I shall always honour; and I have seen them killed sometimes in our fights, or dead of fever in the marshes of the frontier. I have known them, from the labourer to the Prime Minister, from the little novice just accepted into the faith to the head of all the Burmese religion. And I have known their wives and daughters, and have watched many a flirtation in the warm scented evenings; and have seen girls become wives and wives mothers while I have lived amongst them. So that although when the country settled down, and we built houses for ourselves and returned more to English modes of living, and I felt that I was drifting away from them into the distance and necessary ignorance of our official lives, yet I had in my memory much of what I had seen, much of what I had done, that I shall never forget. I felt that I had been—even if it were only for a time—behind the veil, where it is so hard to come.

In looking over these memories it seemed to me that there were many things I did not understand,

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acts of theirs and customs, which I had seen and noted, but of which I did not know the reason. We all know how hard it is to see into the heart even of our own people, those of our flesh and blood who are with us always, and whose ways are our ways, and whose thoughts are akin to ours. And if this be so with them, it is ten thousand times harder with those whose ways are not our ways, and from whose thoughts we must be far apart. It is true that there are no dark places in the lives of the Burmese as there are in the lives of other Orientals. All is open to the light of day in their homes and in their religion, and their women are the freest in the world. Yet the barriers of a strange tongue and a strange religion, and of ways caused by another climate than ours, is so great that, even to those of us who have every wish and every opportunity to understand, it seems sometimes as if we should never know their hearts. It seems as if we should never learn more of them than just the outside—that curiously varied outside which is so deceptive, and which is so apt to prevent our understanding that they are men just as we are and not strange creations from some far-away planet.

So when I settled down and sought to know more of the meaning of what I had seen, I thought that first of all I must learn somewhat of their religion, of that mainspring of many actions, which seemed sometimes admirable, sometimes the reverse, and nearly always foreign to my ideas. It is true that I knew they were Buddhists, that I recognised the yellow-robed monks as followers of the word of Gaudama the Buddha, and that I had a general

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acquaintance with the theory of their faith as picked up from a book or two—notably, Rhys Davids' 'Buddhism' and Bishop Bigandet's book—and from many inconsequent talks with the monks and others. Bu. the knowledge was but superficial, and I was painfully aware that it did not explain much that I had seen and that I saw every day.

So I sent for more books, such books as had been published in English, and I studied them, and hoped thereby to attain the explanations I wanted; and as I studied, I watched as I could the doings of the people, that I might see the effects of causes and the results of beliefs. I read in these sacred books of the mystery of Dharma, of how a man has no soul, no consciousness after death; that to the Buddhist 'dead men rise up never,' and that those who go down to the grave are known no more. I read that all that survives is the effect of a man's actions, the evil effect, for good is merely negative, and that this is what causes pain and trouble to the next life. Everything changes, say the sacred books, nothing lasts even for a moment. 'It will be, and it has been,' is the life of man. The life that lives to-morrow in the next incarnation is no more the life that died in the last than the flame we light in the lamp to-day is the same that went out yesternight. It is as if a stone were thrown into a pool—that is the life, the splash of the stone; all that remains, when the stone lies resting in the mud and weeds below the waters of forgetfulness, are the circles ever widening on the surface, and the ripples never dying, but only spreading farther and farther away. And all this

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delight of her life; and it would seem to me that she must believe in a God and in prayer after all.

So though I found much in these books that was believed by the people, and much that was to them the guiding influence of their lives, yet I was unable to trust to them altogether, and I was in doubt where to seek for the real beliefs of these people. If I went to their monks, their holy men, the followers of the great teacher, Gaudama, they referred me to their books as containing all that a Buddhist believed; and when I pointed out the discrepancies, they only shook their heads, and said that the people were an ignorant people and confused their beliefs in that way.

When I asked what was a Buddhist, I was told that, to be a Buddhist, a man must be accepted into the religion with certain rites, certain ceremonies, he must become for a time a member of the community of the monks of the Buddha, and that a Buddhist was he who was so accepted, and who thereafter held by the teachings of the Buddha.

But when I searched the life of the Buddha, I could not find any such ceremonies necessary at all. So that it seemed that the religion of the Buddha was one religion, and the religion of the Buddhists another; but when I said so to the monks, they were horror-struck, and said that it was because I did not understand.

In my perplexity I fell back, as we all must, to my own thoughts and those of my own people; and I tried to imagine how a Burman would act if he came to England to search into the religion of the English and to know the impulses of our lives.

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I saw how he would be sent to the Bible as the source of our religion, how he would be told to study that if he would know what we believed and what we did not—what it was that gave colour to our lives. I followed him in imagination as he took the Bible and studied it, and then went forth and watched our acts, and I could see him puzzled, as I was now puzzled when I studied his people.

I thought of him reading the New Testament, and how he would come to these verses:

'27. But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,

'28. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

'29. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke, forbid him not to take thy coat also.

'30. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.'

He would read them again and again, these wonderful verses, that he was told the people and Church believed, and then he would go forth to observe the result of this belief. And what would he see? He would see this: A nation proud and revengeful, glorying in her victories, always at war, a conqueror of other peoples, a mighty hater of her enemies. He would find that in the public life of the nation with other nations there was no thought of this command. He would find, too, in her inner life, that the man who took a cloak was not forgiven, but was terribly punished—he used to be hanged.

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792 of the monks, if obtained in a different way to else-
626 where, is very effective.
792

The more you study the monkhood, the more you see that this community is the outcome of the very heart of the people. It is a part of the people, not cut off from them, but of them; it is recruited in great numbers from all sorts and conditions of men. In every village and town—nearly every man has been a monk at one time or another—it is honoured alike by all; it is kept in the straight way, not only from the inherent righteousness of its teaching, but from the determination of the people to allow no stain to rest upon what they consider as their 'great glory.' This whole monkhood is founded on freedom. It is held together not by a strong organization, but by general consent. There is no mystery about it, there are no dark places here where the sunlight of inquiry may not come. The whole business is so simple that the very children can and do understand it. I shall have expressed myself very badly if I have not made it understood how absolutely voluntary this monkhood is, held together by no everlasting vows, restrained by no rigid discipline. It is simply the free outcome of the free beliefs of the people, as much a part of them as the fruit is of the tree. You could no more imagine grapes without a vine than a Buddhist monkhood that did not spring directly from, and depend entirely on, the people. It is the higher expression of their life.

● 114 In writing this account of the Burmese and their
792 religion, I have tried always to see with my own

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eyes, to write my own thoughts without any reference to what anyone else may have thought or written. I have believed that whatever value may attach to any man's opinions consists in the fact that they are his opinions, and not a *réchauffé* of the thoughts of others, and therefore I have not even referred to, or quoted from, any other writer, preferring to write only what I have myself seen and thought. But I cannot end this chapter on the monks of the Buddha without a reference to what Bishop Bigandet has said on the same subject, for he is no observer prejudiced in favour of Buddhism, but the reverse. He was a bishop of the Church of Rome, believing always that his faith contained all truth, and that the Buddha was but a 'pretended saviour,' his teachings based on 'capital and revolting errors,' and marked with an 'inexplicable and deplorable eccentricity.' Bishop Bigandet was in no sympathy with Buddhism, but its avowed foe, desirous of undermining and destroying its influence over the hearts of men, and yet this is the way he ends his chapter:

'There is in that religious body—the monks—a latent principle of vitality that keeps it up and communicates to it an amount of strength and energy that has hitherto maintained it in the midst of wars, revolutionary and political, convulsions of all descriptions. Whether supported or not by the ruling power, it has remained always firm and unchanged. It is impossible to account satisfactorily for such a phenomenon, unless we find a clear and evident cause of such extraordinary vitality, a cause independent of ordinary occurrences of time and circumstances, a cause deeply rooted in the very soul of

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the populations that exhibit before the observer this great and striking religious feature.

'That cause appears to be the strong religious sentiment, the firm faith, that pervades the mass of Buddhists. The laity admire and venerate the religious, and voluntarily and cheerfully contribute to their maintenance and welfare. From its ranks the religious body is constantly recruited. There is hardly a man that has not been a member of the fraternity for a certain period of time.

'Surely such a general and continued impulse could not last long unless it were maintained by a powerful religious connection.

'The members of the order preserve, at least exteriorly, the decorum of their profession. The rules and regulations are tolerably well observed; the grades of hierarchy are maintained with scrupulous exactitude. The life of the religious is one of restraint and perpetual control. He is denied all sorts of pleasures and diversions. How could such a system of self-denial ever be maintained, were it not for the belief which the Rahans have in the merits that they amass by following a course of life which, after all, is repugnant to Nature? It cannot be denied that human motives often influence both the laity and the religious, but, divested of faith and the sentiments supplied by even a false belief, their action could not produce in a lasting and persevering manner the extraordinary and striking fact that we witness in Buddhist countries.'

This monkhood is the proof of how the people believe. Has any religion ever had for twenty-four centuries such a proof as this?

Introduction

This is a study of the falling standard of living of a Burmese family who were uprooted by the insurrection from their village home of Patine in 1949 and transplanted in a refugee camp in Rangoon. The family consisted of U Myaing - a fisherman aged 47; hee wife Ma Aye Myaing, age 33, Daw Aw Zar, his mother, age 72, and four daughters - Ma Tin Shwe, age 14, Ma Khin Myein, age 11, Ma Khni Swe, age 7, and Ma Win Tin, age 5.(1951).

An attempt is made to present quantitatively and qualitatively the items used in, and activities of everyday life in the home village as contrasted with the refugee camp. It is hoped this dynamic situation will reveal some of the basic facts of Burmese culture as they pertain to an average family. The bulk of the data was collected under my direction by Ko Sein Tu, Tutor of the Psychology Department, University of Rangoon, from August 1950 to May 1951. Ko Mya Tu, medical student at the University, helped in collecting the health data. Ma Khin Hmway, Assistant in Anthropology at the University, collected some of the more personal data from the ladies of the family. Professor Mohinda Nath, Head of the Department of Biology, University of Rangoon, kindly arranged for the scientific identification of the food items. Part of the data was collectedby the use of a tape recorder portions of which are reproduced verbatim in this report. Miss Mary Watson, Head Stenographer of the Community Project, gave her valuable help in proof reading and typing the stencils for this report.

A setting for the better understanding of the facts of the family is given in sections on general Burmese Concepts which follow the family data. This was provided by Ko Maung Than, student at the University, who worked as my assistant from August through November 1951.

I am indebted to Dr. Htin Aung, Professor of Anthropology and Rector of the University of Rangoon for his constant support and encouragement in this study. I carried out the study as a Fulbright grantee in Anthropology attached to the United States Educational Foundation in Rangoon, to whose officers I am grateful

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it, carrying on trade with India and the rest of Indo-China. During this period Burmese dancing and music and poetry, as embodied in songs, perhaps assumed definite and national forms. But there was no writing. The kings that came from India probably knew writing, but their knowledge was perhaps limited; in any case, it never reached the people. The introduction of Buddhism into the country brought no writing, as it came through traders whose knowledge of religious learning was meagre. The few religious tracts preserved in monasteries were looked upon merely as curious and sacred objects. The religion, feeble from the beginning, decayed and soon disappeared. The kingdom came to an end in the first century A.D.[1]

A new kingdom was founded in Upper Burma at Pagan, which controlled the land and river trade-routes, and as a result of its commercial advantages, it became a powerful kingdom with the accession to the throne of Anawrahta in 1044. From that point Burmese history ceases to be conjectural. Through the influence of the learned and saintly monk, Shin Arahan, Buddhism in one of its purest forms was introduced into the kingdom by Anawrahta. With it, writing was also introduced. The alphabet was the 'Square Pali', and the literature the *Three Pitakas* embodying all the religious teachings in Pali. Curiously enough, the alphabet and the literature did not come directly from India, but from Burma itself—from the Talaing kingdom of Thaton. The Talaings were a branch of the Burmese race. Many think that they were a mixture of native tribes with Indian traders. I venture to disagree. The earliest inhabitants of Burma were Indonesians, who settled on the coast of Burma during successive 'drifts' of humanity from the west, through India, to further east. Later, there was an infiltration of Mongolian tribes, who came down the rivers from the North. Inland, where the Indonesian element was weak, the new-comers dominated and later became the Burmese; along the coast where the Indonesian element was strong the tribes united and became the Talaings. However, all this is mere conjecture. The early history of the Talaing kingdom of Thaton, which Anawrahta had to destroy to obtain possession of the alphabet and the *Three Pitakas*, is not known, except that it was perhaps in existence a few centuries before Christ and was under the influence

[1] Pe Maung Tin and G. H. Luce, *The Glass Palace Chronicle*; A. Phayre, *History of Burma*. G. E. Harvey in his *History of Burma* contends that the first Burmese kingdom was Prome, and that it flourished only in about the seventh century A.D.

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Though prose and poetry had thus assumed definite forms by about the fourteenth, or early fifteenth century, the drama was unknown until very much later. The first real Burmese drama appeared, though it had its origins some decades earlier, only towards the close of the eighteenth century, and during the next hundred years it developed and then decayed. Burmese dramatic literature developed in a historical sequence and in a way essentially similar to that of the Elizabethan drama. But why the similarity? Is it accident? Is it because of the similarity in the geographical isolation of the two countries? Or, is there a definite way in which all dramas have to develop in natural sequence?

2. Sources of Information

The history of Burmese drama can be divided into six stages. First, there is the age of the *Nibbathkhin*, comparable to the English miracle play, ending about 1752. Second, we have, from 1752 to 1819, the period of the interlude[1] (comparable to the English morality and interlude) and the court drama. Third, we have the period of the dramatist, U Kyin U, 1819 to 1853. Fourth, we have the period of the poet, U Pon Nya, 1853 to 1878. Fifth, there is the period of decadence, 1878 to 1886. Sixth, we have the time from 1886 to the present day. As dates are in many cases uncertain in determining the periods I am taking the reigns of various kings. As the drama depended much on the court and the victories and defeats of the king, perhaps I am justified in so doing. In any case, if a date is wrong, it is wrong by not more than two or three years.

The time before 1752 is the most difficult period as far as research is concerned. The centuries that followed the fall of Pagan—the time of internal wars, 1287 to 1531—saw the rise of a vernacular literature, which is found existing in the Empire of 1531 to 1752.[2]

arranges its extracts in more or less chronological order, and therefore gives a good idea of the development. The subject is outside the scope of this work but I mention it to show how late the first appearance of Burmese drama was as compared with other branches of Burmese literature.

[1] The term 'interlude' is explained in chap. i.

[2] Perhaps it will not be out of place to give a short summary of the history. The various small States into which the country broke up after 1287 gave place, after some fifty years of incessant strife, to Ava, the kingdom of the Burmese, and Pegu, that of the Talaings. The small principality of Toungoo under Ava rebelled and conquered the whole of Burma in 1531.

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173 drama. In 1916 I saw a *Nibhatkhin* at the obscure town of Pauk.
178 For this period, I am greatly indebted to the notes made by my
536* father. They are the results of inquiries and researches spread over
127 a period of forty or fifty years. I realize that to many European scholars the section on the *Nibhatkhin* must appear conjectural in its dependence on tradition. My plea is that at present there is nothing else to depend on.[1]

175 With regard to the interlude, I am on surer ground. Again I
536* depend much on tradition, but it is now tradition supported by
[791] evidence. Besides the general and common tradition, there is the
127 tradition of my own family.
647

Professional tradition of the mediums and actors is more reliable
[791] than common tradition because the two professions, especially the former, are closed fraternities, and as written records were never in use, they handed down the facts regarding the nature and history of their callings by word of mouth. To them oral tradition was as strong as written records. Moreover, their oral tradition can be checked by the stage conventions which exist at the present day. The various stage conventions are considered in Chapter VII.

The tradition in my family[2] begins from about the year 1800. About that time, an officer[3] in the victorious army of King Bodawpaya

● [114] [1] Even Harvey, who wrote his *History of Burma* at Exeter College, Oxford, often accepts oral tradition supported by no other evidence as substantially correct (*History of Burma*, pp. 33, 41, 211, 252, 267, 299). In two instances, pp. 33 and 41, the tradition cited dates back to the eleventh century A.D.

[2] My father is U Pein, District Magistrate, Burma Commission, now retired. In Burma, historical researches and inquiries are often made by administrative officials, as their duties carry them all over the country and to the remotest villages. Messrs Harvey, Stewart, Furnivall—great names in the Burma Research Society—are all officials belonging to the Burma Commission.

[3] He was Maha Minhla Mindin Raza.

I have to cite in this section the full names and official positions of some members of my family because:

[551] 1. As the Burmese use no surnames, my name alone would not convey anything regarding their identity.

2. The service record of the family may perhaps be construed as evidence in favour of the reliability of its tradition. G. E. Harvey, op. cit., p. 310 where he rejects Fuhrer's statement regarding an inscription because the 'precious slab has never been produced, and in view of Fuhrer's service record its production is essential.'

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647 accounts regarding it. Apart from the notes gathered by my father, I
175 base my information on the accounts given to me orally by my grand-
536* mother and grand-aunts who actually saw the interludes performed.
127 In support of the oral tradition regarding the nature of the
175 interlude, there are some echoes of it in the plays of U Kyin U. He
536* developed the interlude into a proper play, but the change was not a sudden one, and in his plays we find echoes of the interlude in its various stages. His plays are considered in detail in another chapter. There are also contemporary references to the interlude. Even from an English pen we have an account. Colonel Yule in 1855 saw an entertainment midway between the interlude and the developed plays of U Kyin U.[1]

644 The period of the court plays offers an easier task for research.
536* The *Rama* play from Siam is preserved, with adaptations, it is true,
[177] but with notes on the original when a change was made in the pre-
538 served version.[2] The other Siamese play of *Eenaung* has come down to us. The poem *Rama-yagan* which Burmanized the *Rama* story has also come down. Accounts of the performances of the court plays and the recitation of the poem at court are many and well known. From the time when they were first composed down to the present day, the works of these court poets and dramatists have been studied and read. The influence of these works on the interlude is suggested, not only by the 'internal evidence' in U Kyin U's plays, but also by the editorial prefaces to the works in their various editions.

[114] Though only three plays of U Kyin U exist at the present day as far as is known, the period is quite easy of research, because references and notes regarding him occur in various records of the court and the nobility, and because the Burma Research Society has published new editions of two of his plays; and though the prefaces to them are short and no attempt is made to make a complete study, suggestions for further study and research are made by the editors.

175 The period of U Pon Nya offers the easiest task, as compared with
536* other periods, so far as research is concerned. All his plays are

[1] H. Yule, *A Narrative of the Mission sent by the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava in 1855*. His description of the dramatic entertainment he saw is considered again in the next chapter in connexion with Sir William Ridgeway's theory of the development of the Burmese drama.

[2] There is a copy of the *Rama* play in the British Museum. It is wrongly catalogued as by U Ku, who was only the editor. All these plays and the poem have been printed again and again, and are easily obtainable in Burma.

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have been celebrated year after year, at least since the reintroduction of Buddhism in 1056, and at least since March, 638, when an early king of Pagan, Popa Sawrahan (613–40), drew up the present Burmese era, the dawn of every Burmese new year has been the occasion for mirthful water-throwing.[1]

Buddhism had been introduced into the country through commercial relations with India long before the foundation of the kingdom of Pagan, but from the beginning it was only at second-hand and therefore feeble. The real religion of the Burmese before the reintroduction of Buddhism in 1056 was animistic, and they worshipped various spirits, known as *nats*. There were mediums, mostly women, who danced to please the spirits, and as the spirits were supposed to enter into the bodies of the mediums, sometimes it was believed that the spirits, and not the mediums, were actually dancing. Sometimes the medium herself actually believed that a spirit had taken control of her body, but usually she only pretended that a spirit had entered her, and gave an exhibition of acting. As the medium of each particular *nat* dressed herself in appropriate clothes, the spirit dances were essentially dramatic.[2] When Buddhism, in one of its purest forms, was introduced under Anawrahta, the great king realized the impossibility of attracting people suddenly to the new faith; so he compromised by recognizing the *nats* as Buddhist spirits and giving them shrines in his Shwezigôn Pagoda as its guardian spirits. When asked the reason, Anawrahta replied: 'Men will not come suddenly to the new faith. Let them come for their old gods, and they will gradually be won over.'[3]

So the worship of the *nats* lived on, and with the advance of

[1] Shway-Yoe (Sir George Scott) in *The Burman: His Life and Notions*, and Fielding Hall in *The Soul of a People* give detailed accounts of the feasts and life in the villages. However, as far as I have been able to find out, the Tazaungmôn celebrations have never been described in any English work.

[2] These dances are still performed on spirit-feast days at Taungbyôn (near Mandalay), a small town given up to spirit worship since the days of Pagan's greatness and perhaps even before.

The belief in, as distinct from the worship of, spirits is not alien to Buddhism.

The chief works on the subject are: Sir R. C. Temple, *The Thirty-Seven Nats*; Grant Brown, 'The Taungbyon Festival' in *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 1915; the same author's 'The Pre-Buddhist Religion of the Burmese' in *Folk-Lore*, 1921; and G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma*.

[3] G. E. Harvey, op. cit., p. 33.

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536* 178 773 538 While the interlude was developing, the drama, another form of entertainment, was also becoming rapidly popular. The *Hawsa* or the dramatic reading and recital of a Birth Story in verse was becoming the fashion. The *Hawsa* was in dialogue form, and the reciter changed his voice and used dramatic gestures. As I have said, one cannot be certain of many things regarding the interlude, but it seems exceedingly probable that the early interludes were not literary. The actors were unlettered, unpractised in verse composition and only knew the *Jataka* Birth Stories from translations. The *Hawsa*, on the other hand, was a literary work. It was in verse. The reciter was an accomplished verse-writer if not a poet, and when reciting pieces he himself had not written, he invariably put in additions and modifications. He knew Pali and therefore could read the *Jatakas* in the original. Whilst the actor was looked upon as nothing more than a beggar, the reciter was greatly respected. This will perhaps explain why the *Hawsa*, and not the interlude, has come down to us in writing.[1] With all the differences, however, the reciter and the actor were akin to each other, and both contributed much to the rise of the developed play, just as both the dramatic recitations of the epic *Ramayana*, and the open-air performances of its scenes contributed much to the rise of the developed Sanskrit play in India.

536* There is no special term for that entertainment which I have called the interlude. The name *Pya-zat*, which means a play, is vaguely applied to it in common with developed plays, but it is certain that the term came into use only about the time of U Kyin U to denote developed plays. Therefore, I have ventured to name it the interlude, partly because of its similarity to the English interlude, but mainly because it was given in the middle of, or at least subsidiary to, the main entertainment of dancing.

[175] The interlude and the *Hawsa* were at the height of their popularity in 1767 when Siam was conquered. The results of the conquest are considered in Chapter II.

4. Sir William Ridgeway's Theory of the Origins and Development of Burmese Drama

536* 114 Sir William Ridgeway, in *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races*, considers that the dramas and dramatic dances of those races support his theory regarding Greek tragedy, that it arose

[1] Some specimens of the *Hawsa* are given in the *Anthology of Burmese Literature*.

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out of the worship of the dead. Most scholars are sceptical of that animistic theory of the origin of the drama. With regard to the Greek drama, Dr Farnell, in *The Cult of the Greek States*, seems to prove clearly that Ridgeway is wrong. Likewise with regard to Sanskrit drama, Dr Keith, in his book on the subject, rejects Ridgeway's theory; and he adds more generally: 'Whether elsewhere the worship of the dead resulted in drama is a matter open to grave doubt. Certainly in the case of the Greek drama, which offers the most interesting parallel to that of India, the evidence of derivation from the funeral games is wholly defective.'[1]

Ridgeway treats of Burmese drama in detail. He knows it only from hearsay. He has never seen a play acted on the Burmese stage, nor has he read any in the original or translation. All his information is purely descriptive of the actual presentation of a play, not of the play itself. His informants knew no Burmese dramatic literature nor did they have any idea as to the history of the drama. Nevertheless, Ridgeway gives quite a good estimate of the nature of the drama. The fault lies chiefly with Mr Taw Sein Kho, on whose information Ridgeway mainly relies. The late Mr Taw Sein Kho was no doubt a great archæologist, but he was a poor student of Burmese literature, and he had absolutely no idea of the origins and development of Burmese drama. In his letter[2] to the Director-General of the Archæological Survey of India, who was in correspondence with him on the nature of Burmese drama at the request of Ridgeway, he wrote: 'The *Ramayana* in an adapted form is also acted. I am inclined to think that it was derived by the Burmans from the Cambodians, because the dresses and stage paraphernalia of the Burmans and Cambodians in acting the play are so strikingly similar.' As the Siamese *Ramayana* was influenced by, or came from the same sources as the Cambodian *Ramayana*, Mr Taw Sein Kho did good detective work. But his letter shows clearly that he was absolutely ignorant of the introduction of the Siamese *Ramayana* into Burma and its results. He seems to have known nothing about the great dramatists, U Kyin U and U Pon Nya, for Ridgeway does not mention them at all.

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Ridgeway traces the development of Burmese drama in three main stages:

[1] A. B. Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*.

[2] The letter is quoted in *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races*.

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536* 1. The impersonation of the *nats* by mediums;
114 2. The true dramatic element borrowed from the Indian historical
174 plays of Rama, presented by puppet players;
3. Drama based on the Indian models, but finding its themes in national history and mythology, intermixed with Buddhistic elements, and performed by puppets and living actors.

178 I proceed to deal with these three alleged stages.
536* 1. There is no doubt that the impersonation of the *nats* by
114 mediums had, and still has, the element of the dramatic, as I have described. However, it is unreasonable to hold that the impersonation in question was the origin of Burmese drama. Ridgeway puts forward three lines of argument with regard to his theory: (*a*) the worship of the dead and the ritual connected with it have resulted in true dramas in other countries: the impersonation of the *nats* by mediums is a ritual connected with the worship of the dead, and therefore, as in other countries, it has resulted in the rise of a drama; (*b*) the *nat* dances had, and still have, the dramatic element in them; (*c*) the derivation of true Burmese drama from the earliest stages of the drama, the *nat* dances, is proved by the fact that there is a tree in the centre of the 'stage' when a play is being presented. These lines of argument are unsound.

(*a*) Whether the worship of the dead results in drama in other countries is doubtful. We have seen that the view has been controverted as regards Greece and as regards India. Even if it were true of countries around Burma, it would not follow that the theory holds good as regards Burma, for that country has a history and civilization distinctly national because of its geographical barriers.

(*b*) There is no doubt as to the existence of the dramatic element in the *nat* dances. But such an element also existed in the various folk feasts of the Burmese people. Ridgeway has no information regarding them. Though the spirit dances made some contribution to the rise of the drama, they were not mainly responsible, and it could not be said that the drama developed out of those dances. They gave to the country new dances and new dancers, and they developed dancing and music. But the true drama resulted only from the presentation of religious stories by amateurs. The *nat* dancers were essentially professional, and alien to the religious feeling and education that inspired the *Nibhathkhin*. It is true that those professionals later developed the drama, but they did so as professional actors and not as spirit mediums.

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Before proceeding any further perhaps I ought to explain what I mean when I speak of the 'origins' of Burmese drama. A great deal of confusion can result through the vagueness of the term 'origins'. By it I mean that point where the drama has taken some definite shape as drama, and not merely as dramatic elements. If we were to consider as origins all prehistoric dramatic elements in the life and customs of the nation, it would lead us nowhere. The worship of the *nats* in some form or other must have been developed by the tribes that first settled in Burma. And as religious ritual leads to music and dancing among primitive people, the worship led to the development of Burmese music and dancing. But we cannot take music and dancing as the origins of drama. No doubt music and dancing are necessary for the rise of a drama, but speech is necessary too, and yet we cannot say that the first attempt of man to express himself was the real origin of drama. It is vital to distinguish mere dramatic elements from true drama. In this connexion, Dr Keith's treatment of the origins of Sanskrit drama is enlightening. Many had contended before him that the Sanskrit drama had its origins in Vedic ritual. Dr Keith, however, rejects the theory. He recognizes the dramatic elements in Vedic ritual, but he recognizes them as such and not as the origins of the drama. No doubt the dramatic elements in the ritual gave some idea of the dramatic to the Indian people, but the drama did not arise out of them. It arose only when the great Indian epics had spread all over the country, for the true origin of the drama was in the recitation of the epics. With regard to Burmese drama, although the elements of the dramatic existed in the worship of the spirits and in various folk customs and folk feasts, the origin of the true drama was in the religious pageants and the *Nibhatkhin*.

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(*c*) Ridgeway puts forward the tree in the middle of the 'stage' as evidence of the fact that the drama developed out of the *nat* worship. He contends that the tree is a symbol of the *nat*, because *nats* live in trees. He quotes from Colonel Yule's account of his embassy to Burma where the latter described a Burmese play in progress. There was no actual stage in those days. The play was given in the centre of an open place or yard, and the space for the actors was marked off. In the centre of that space was a tree. The ambassador inquired as to the purpose of the tree, but he was given a 'somewhat vague answer' that it represented a forest. He was not satisfied and put forward the theory that there must have been some belief connected with the tree, for it was present on all the occasions on which he

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178 witnessed Burmese plays.[1] Ridgeway approves of that theory. He
536* maintains that the tree is symbolic of the worship of the *nats*. In an
appendix to the book he quotes a letter from a resident in Burma
● 114 (which arrived too late to be discussed in the book itself), describing
some sort of a *nat* ritual where a spirit was supposed to be dwelling in a
[776] tree. However, *nats* are supposed to dwell, not only in trees, but also
[796] in houses, mountains, streams, lakes, on Mount Mayyu, in fact every-
where, and it is extremely unlikely that the tree should have been chosen
specially to represent the abode of the *nat*. In all the ritual connected
with the worship of the thirty-seven *nats*, the use of a tree does not occur
except in the case of the *nat*, U-Yin-Gyi. When offerings are made
to him, a wooden representation of a forked branch of a tree is used.
But that symbol is used only when that particular spirit alone is
being worshipped, i.e. when all the *nats* are being worshipped *en bloc*
the symbol is not used. U-Yin-Gyi has no special connexion with
the stage, and he is essentially connected with Lower Burma; and
Upper Burma, not Lower, was the home of Burmese drama. And
what Colonel Yule took to be a vague answer was the true answer.
What he saw was an interlude and not a developed play, and, as has
been stated, the scene of the interlude was almost always the forest,
for it needed nothing except a tree to indicate the scene. Therefore,
the tree which the ambassador saw was a piece of stage scenery and
nothing more.

536* Though Ridgeway's theory that the drama had its origins in the
795 worship of the *nats*, therefore, is not founded on fact, his contention
that the Burmese professional actors are the lineal descendants of the
mediums who impersonated the spirits of the dead is not wrong.
But the fact that the actors are the descendants of such persons should
not mislead us into thinking the drama to be a descendant of spirit
worship. There is a great danger of being thus misled if one knows
the various stage conventions without knowing the real history of the
drama. And had Ridgeway been acquainted with those conven-
tions, which (strangely enough) were not known to him and his
informants, he might have been strengthened in his view. The
most important of the stage conventions is the *nat* chorus which
often acts as a 'curtain-raiser' to the actual play. The chorus
composed of females comes out and sings and dances to various *nat*

[1] H. Yule, *A Narrative of the Mission sent by the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava in 1855.*

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tunes played by the orchestra. The chorus was first introduced for two reasons: the audience liked a dance, and the actors did not forget that their original calling was that of mediums.

2. According to Ridgeway, the second stage of the drama was reached when the 'true dramatic element borrowed from the Indian historical plays of Rama, presented by the puppet players' had entered Burmese drama. The weak points in this theory will be apparent when the further history of the drama is considered in later chapters. The 'true dramatic element' was already in the *Nibbathkhin*, or at least in the interlude; the Indian *Ramayana* coming by way of Siam did influence Burmese drama, but this was possible only because there was already a native drama to absorb this foreign influence. Nor were the *Rama* plays presented at first by puppet players. When the translations and adaptations of the Siamese *Ramayana* were being first presented at court, puppet plays were unknown. Ridgeway puts forward some opinions regarding the Burmese puppet show also, but they will be considered in Chapter VII.

3. According to Ridgeway, the third stage of Burmese drama was reached when there appeared plays 'based on the Indian models, but finding their themes in the national history and mythology, intermixed with Buddhistic elements, and performed by puppets and living actors.' It is true that after the introduction of the Siamese *Rama* play to the Burmese court, plays of the type described appeared, but the plays were by no means modelled on the *Rama* play. The Siamese play gave rise to a native court drama which influenced the interlude and prepared the way for the first great Burmese dramatist, U Kyin U. And the 'Buddhistic elements' which entered the drama have a history of their own. All these points are considered in later chapters.

On the nature and achievements of Burmese drama, Ridgeway says: 'The Burmese drama has not remained crystallized as a piece of religious ritual. On the contrary, it has made distinct steps towards the true drama which Thepis in Greece and the forerunners of Marlowe and Shakespeare in England detached from the sacred shrines and lifted into a distinct artistic form. Yet it has not advanced beyond the lyrical stage, consisting of dancing, singing and instruments of music, the undulation of the vocal expression being much more subtle and intense than the expression of features, whilst gesture is restricted to the conventional gestures of the dance. The usual scene is the palace, its inmates the characters, and the drama

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536 114 adheres tenaciously to the tradition of royalty. Hero and heroine are prince and princess, their retinue courtiers, and the countrymen jester and clown; the king is idealized, his deputies travestied.' In short, the Burmese drama is narrow in range. These opinions of Ridgeway are true and just in many respects, but they have also their weakness. He errs in thinking that Burmese drama is still in the undeveloped lyrical stage. What he thinks to be an earlier stage is [178] in reality a later one. Dancing and singing have dominated the Burmese *pwe* (the public presentation of a play) since the fall of the kingdom, but that stage was only reached after decadence had set in in the drama developed so well by U Kyin U and U Pon Nya. What Mr Taw Sein Kho described in his letter to the Director-General of the Archæological Survey, what most other informants of Ridgeway also saw, was Burmese drama in decadence and distortion. The scene of the drama is not always the palace, though the palace and its inmates appear almost always in Burmese plays. The forest, village, city and the common people often appear, though it is true that they are subordinated to the dramatic interest in the palace and its inmates. [565] Burmese drama was forced to confine itself in general to the palace, as in a society where other class distinctions scarcely existed, the king and his courtiers alone were different from the rest: and, in general, a Burmese audience wanted characters somewhat different from those of common life. The same was true of the Elizabethan drama. Though the 'domestic' drama was popular, the best plays of the Elizabethans have their scenes in distant lands or in high society. Therefore the narrowness of its range does not necessarily make out Burmese drama to be in an early stage of growth. For the sake of completeness, I have described briefly these aspects of the drama, but they will be considered in detail in later chapters.

The opinions expressed by Sir William Ridgeway are full of error. The worth of the chapter on Burmese drama in his *Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races* consists in this, that it was he who made the first attempt to study the development of Burmese drama scientifically, to compare it with the drama of other countries, and to form an estimate of it according to western standards of criticism. And, erroneous though his views are, it is much to his credit that with the scanty and often misleading information before him he could give such a shrewd estimate of Burmese drama.

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Lower Burma

So for about a decade after the death of U Pon Nya, the drama decayed and was left entirely in the hands of actors. And in Upper Burma, the real home of the drama, it never recovered from their influence. True, some scholars in the quiet of a monastery wrote many a play, retelling a religious story, but their plays were never meant to be presented on the stage, nor did they follow the established dramatic traditions. They were merely scholarly exercises, and though many contained masterly prose and poetry, they did not really belong to the true drama, for they were plays only in name.[1] In Lower Burma, however, scholars again assumed control of the drama, though they had to comply with the desires of the actors in many matters. The change in the venue of Burmese drama is significant. Rangoon, the capital of British Burma, and not Mandalay, the national capital, was now the centre of dramatic development. The reasons for the change were many. The court was the centre of political intrigues and the drama could no longer look to it for development. Upper Burma was in a hopeless condition, and it never recovered until some years after the completion of the British conquest in 1886. In Lower Burma, on the other hand, by about 1875, the benefits of a developed commerce were seen, and after a few years of transition, prosperity was returning. There was peace and stability of government. The spirit of the people in Lower Burma was no longer of anxiety and despair. But it was not one of great serenity, for they realized that Upper Burma would soon fall into British hands, and the Burmese would never again have a kingdom of their own. There was intense regret, and the Burmese Crown, from which the past greatness of the nation had flowed, came to be looked upon with great sentimentality. True, the court in Upper Burma was in a disgraceful condition, especially since the death of Mindon and the accession of his son, Theebaw (1875–86), but that very deterioration, by contrast, enhanced the sentimental respect for the past glories of the throne. The drama therefore was used to present scenes of great splendour, in which court manners and customs were shown to an audience who, having come under an alien rule since 1824, knew their national court only from hearsay. That was why sentimentality and spectacle continued to dominate the drama, even though conditions had improved enough

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[1] Some plays of this type, printed in Lower Burma, are preserved in the British Museum, e.g. *Thuwana-thama* and *Maha Zanaka*, both by monks and founded on U Awbatha's *Jatakas* of the same names. Many of these plays are still obtainable in Burma.

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church has been connected with a consciousness of the paradoxical content of faith."[3]

My inquiry, thus begun in Burma, was continued in Ceylon and India and concluded in New York. It has been pursued, with various interruptions, for some twenty years. In listing my acknowledgments, I am therefore aware that I may omit some who have given me generous help, more especially in the earlier days in Burma, since some of the notes relating to this period were lost during the Japanese invasion. I must also make it clear that acknowledgment of help given does not imply approval of the views expressed in this work. I am fully aware that some of these views are debatable. Any Western writer, knowing how much confusion has been caused by the temptation to read Western preconceptions into Buddhist thought, is bound to feel hesitant in expressing his own conclusions. He looks for the day when other scholars from the Orient such as the late U Shwe Zan Aung, themselves acquainted with our Western idiom, will assist our interpretation. Meantime he can only hope that his own efforts will promote that better understanding between East and West which may yield new insights in the universal search for truth.

While in India, I was invited to Union Theological Seminary, New York, and I am most grateful to the President, Dr Henry P. Van Dusen and the members of the Seminary for this invitation and the subsequent hospitality and facilities received there which enabled the preparation of this work as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy awarded by Columbia University. I am especially indebted to the following for their generous encouragement and assistance: Dr Horace L. Friess, Dr Frederick C. Grant, Dr Arthur Jeffery, Dr Richard Kroner, Dr August Karl Reischauer, Dr David E. Roberts and Dr Herbert W. Schneider.

In his devoted work for the Missionary Research Library, the late Mr Charles H. Fahs collected books and documents on Burma not available elsewhere, and I am glad to have this opportunity of acknowledging his most courteous assistance. I am similarly very grateful for the help I received from Dr Lucy W. Markley and the staff of the Union Seminary Library; Dr Marguerite Block of the Low Memorial Library, Columbia University; and from the librarians of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University.

To the Rev. R. F. Spear, American Methodist Mission, Pegu, Burma, I am very grateful for permission to read and quote from his MS thesis,

[3] G. Ljunggren, "The Paradox as a Theological Expression," *Swedish Theological Quarterly Review*, (1928), p. 333, quoted by Gustaf Aulén, *The Faith of the Christian Church* (trans. by Wahlstrom and Arden, 1948), Part I, p. 101.

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The Syncretism of Animism and Buddhism in Burma, and to the Northwestern University and Garrett Biblical Institute, Evanston, Illinois, for allowing me to consult this MS.

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Correspondents who have been kind enough to answer my questions on specific issues include the late Professor J. A. Stewart of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Dr William Stede, co-editor of the Pali English Dictionary; U Lu Pe Win, Mandalay, Superintendent, Archaeological Survey, Burma; Dr A. D. Sagayam, Maymyo, Upper Burma; and the Rev. H. Harwood, American Methodist Mission, Rangoon, Burma.

For the co-operation and very valuable help given me by my wife I can never be too grateful, and in the final preparation of this work for the Press I am greatly indebted to Professor J. Duchesne-Guillemin of Liége University and to my colleague at McGill, Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith.

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ROBERT LAWSON SLATER

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The discovery of Buddhism, and the discovery of the Pali literature, have been compared with the impact of those Greek manuscripts which, one by one, came into the hands of Renaissance scholars after the capture of Constantinople by the Turks.[11] It is a significant comparison. Perhaps it explains the tendency of many European readers to regard the Buddhist scriptures in much the same light as Renaissance scholars regarded their Greek manuscripts — as museum treasures, as words from the past, reminders of a bygone culture. Joined with this tendency was the fashion to represent Buddhism as primarily a philosophy or a morality — a morality in search of religion, said the Christians; a morality happily divorced from religion, said their critics.

Ex oriente lux! Once again it was happening, as so often before, but this time the new light from the East was a sober evangel, just the evangel needed by an 'age of science which no longer wants to believe, but to know,' a teaching presenting 'the kernel of all religions and all metaphysics ... guaranteed in accordance with the methods of exact science.'[12] In the 'mountain of books' on Buddhism, written in the West in the last century, many of them based on the flimsiest evidence, would-be exponents have found in Buddhism the anticipation of their own philosophic preferences. Spinoza, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Bradley, Bergson and Bertrand Russell have all been cited, and have all been read into Buddhism, with confusing results. It was largely this emphasis on Buddhism *as a philosophy* which led at first to negative conceptions of Nirvana.

In 1912, a discerning Buddhist scholar in Burma uttered a protest. The Western scholar, he observed, "seems like one who has drawn forth from some 'chamber long to quiet vowed' a curious object all dented and covered with dust, concerning the origin and history of which he at once begins to speculate, without first enquiring if there are not some fresh, new specimens of the object to be found in everyday use around him. He treats of Buddhism as a dead and gone system and ignores the fact of its present existence as a living force in the lives of countless millions of his fellowmen, — pays little or no heed to the circumstance that, in addition to a literature belonging to the past, Buddhism possesses a living and active tradition in the present.

"The history of discussions at one time current in the West and not yet quite extinct, as to the meaning of Nibbāna,[13] presents a fairly charac-

[10] E.g. Woodward's translation of Vol. V of the Aṅguttara-Nikāya for the Pali Text Society, an important scripture, is dated only 1936.

[11] Rhys Davids, *American Lectures* II, 44.

[12] George Grimm, *Die Lehre des Buddha*, pp. 7, 9.

[13] *Nibbāna* is the Pali equivalent for the Sanskrit *Nirvāṇa*.

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teristic specimen of the scholar's method of setting to work upon the investigation of Buddhist ideas. Ancient manuscripts, and commentaries upon them only a trifle less ancient, were racked for every slightest word that might bear upon the vexed question, and every such finding was discussed *pro* and *con* entirely with reference to its meaning as that meaning might present itself to an *occidental* mind; and it never seemed to occur to anybody that the simplest and best way to find out what Nibbāna really meant was to ask one or two of the more intelligent among the living representatives of the religion in which the word was used to express one of its leading concepts."[14] Written in dispraise of other Western authors, this criticism was also written in very lavish praise of a new book on Buddhism by Mrs Rhys Davids[15]. In that book, the authoress was far from rejecting Buddhism as a philosophy. But she also affirmed that the Buddha himself should be recognised, not only as a Sage, but as a prophet — a prophet "who had seen in a vision of universal law, not a philosophic theory only ... but a saving Truth, a Religion, whereby he might purify his own beliefs and redeem mankind."

Once Buddhism is seen for what it is, a religion, and a living religion at that, it becomes increasingly difficult to reconcile the older Western misinterpretation of Nirvana as annihilation in such a context.

4. The Buddhist Religion

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A glance at the long history of Buddhism shows that it has been, at different times and in different settings, a dynamic religious movement. Through many veils of legend, the Founder, Gautama,[16] is discerned as a young noble of the Sakyan clan in Northern India, some six centuries before the Christian era, who combined a sage moral insight with deep religious conviction. This conviction has been disguised for some by the fact that Gautama avoided exaggerations, for religion, by many minds, has frequently been identified with the abnormal and the extreme. But Gautama, in his first 'sermon' at Benares, preached a Middle Way. His followers were to avoid sensuality, on the one hand, and, on the other, the extremes of asceticism which he himself had practised in vain. He seems to have shared with his contemporaries a pessimistic valuation of the ceaseless round of Ill, the grim cycle of repeated, frustrating existence in which men felt themselves to be trapped, and the pith of his teaching

[14] Review in *J.B.R.S.*, Vol II, Part II (December, 1912) pp. 249ff.

[15] *Buddhism, a Study of the Buddhist Norm.*

[16] Rendered variously as Gotama, Gaudama, etc. Other names for the historic Buddha are Śākyamuni, the Tathāgata and his personal name, Siddārtha.

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175 792 779* But Burmese kings were not always good. The monasteries which became centres of community life in village after village have to be pictured more often against a dark background of marauding armies, political feud and violent revolt. This chequered history gives point to the suggestion that Burma owes its civilisation and 'the preservation of ... moral and mental balance' very largely to the Buddhist Order which persisted and grew apace through all vicissitudes.[33] Within the Order, there was a remarkable degree of discipline, upheld by a *Thāthanābaing* or Burmese Arch-Abbot. There was also a remarkable unanimity. [795] Although there were different schools and parties, it is significant that there is little, if any, hint of doctrinal controversy. If there had been any considerable impact of Mahāyāna interpretation, we should surely have heard more about it. What, on the contrary, is much more evident, is the 177 795 779* continued impact of Ceylon. Perhaps the most serious division was occasioned by a claim that it was necessary to resort to Ceylon to maintain the legitimate 'line of descent.'[34] There were, it is true, schismatics. Non-conformist Paramata sects decried the Order and taught the existence of an immanent Divine Being, the *Shwe Nyan Daw*, a belief which may reflect either Mahāyāna or Hindu influence. By and large, however the dominating religious and cultural force was Hīnayāna Buddhism for eight centuries without interruption. We have therefore good reason for beginning a study of Southern Buddhism in a country which has been so deeply impressed by its influence.

●114 121 There is also a personal reason. It was in Burma, some twenty years ago, that my own acquaintance with Buddhism began. It was during discussions with monks and laymen there that I began to think that Nirvana was the ultimate religious term of their faith — the term which symbolised the consummation of their doctrine, practice and aspiration. And the mode of expression of this Nirvana symbol seemed to me significant, not only for my Buddhist friends, but for all concerned with the study of religion and life.

[33] J. A. Stewart, "Note on Some Authorities for the History of Burma," *J.B.R.S.*, XIII (1923), p. 75.

[34] M. H. Bode, *Pali Literature of Burma*, chap. II, p. 19.

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CHAPTER II

BUDDHISM AND ANIMISM IN BURMA

1. Animism or Buddhism?

It never occurred to anybody, remarked the Burmese critic quoted in our previous chapter, that the best way to find out what Nirvana meant was to consider its significance in some present, living tradition of Buddhism. His criticism was apposite in its immediate reference. As a matter of fact, however, it was precisely this course which *did* occur to Bishop Bigandet a century ago, as his voluminous footnotes to his translation of the Burmese Legend of Gaudama show.[1] The same may be said of his predecessor in the field, Father Sangermano, and of several successors.[2] Our present purpose is to take up the task where they left it. We hope to describe Buddhism in Burma in sufficient detail to exhibit the essentially religious character of the Nirvana paradox.

Since the context is Burmese and the reference is to Hīnayāna or Southern Buddhism, Nirvana for the time being will be *Nibbāna*, which is its form in the Pali language of the Hīnayāna scriptures. In Burmese, Nibbāna is Nebban.

One reason, perhaps, why this approach to the subject has been largely disregarded by Western scholars in recent years is the prevalent impression that the popular religion in Burma is a syncretism in which the dominant element is not Buddhism, but Animism. "Hinayana," writes Dr. Bouquet, in an outline of Comparative Religion, "is still 'the little vehicle,' because it does not and cannot appeal to the masses of any population.... It is true that it is the Buddhism of Burma and Ceylon. But anyone who knows these countries is well aware that the real popular faith of their peoples is not Hinayana but a thinly veiled animism."[3]

[1] Rt. Rev. P. Bigandet, Bishop of Ramatha, *The Life or Legend of Gaudama, the Buddha of the Burmese*, first published in Rangoon 1858.

[2] Father Vincentius Sangermano, *The Burmese Empire*, first published in 1833.

[3] A. C. Bouquet, *Comparative Religion*, new ed., 1945, p. 129. Dr. J. B. Pratt's balanced estimate of the Burma situation in his *The Pilgrimage of Buddhism* (1928) should have done something to correct this impression.

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Note on SHWE ZAN AUNG

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Besides translating (in collaboration with Mrs Rhys Davids) the *Kathā-Vatthu* and the *Abhidhammattha-Saṃgaha* for the Pali Text Society, with an Introductory Essay to the latter, Shwe Zan Aung published, in instalments, in the *Journal of the Burma Research Society* (1917) a study of "The Buddhist Philosophy of the Real" and followed this up by the "Dialogue on Nibbāna," which I have quoted in chapter III. Born in 1871 at Akyab, he graduated from Rangoon College in 1892 and was later appointed a Magistrate in Henzada.

"My colleage," wrote Mrs Rhys Davids, "has been in close touch with several very learned monks, including the distinguished Doctor, Ledi Sadaw, in a country where the study of Abbidhamma, or philosophy, is cultivated more than elsewhere. Bhikkus from Ceylon come now, as in days of old, to study philosophy under the Theras of Burma, so renowned are the latter for proficiency in this subject. Mr Aung has also, through a course of study necessarily limited ..... assimilated a notable purview of our own philosophic tradition. He is thus better fitted than most Oriental students to translate into our vehicles of expression the living meaning, as distinguished from the *etymological* connotation, of Buddhist philosophical terms."[1] "I have," wrote Shwe Zan Aung himself, in his last note in the *Compendium*, "no theories of my own. ... I am acting only as the mouthpiece of my country's teachers. At best I am but an interpreter of Burmese views based on the Ceylon Commentary and the works of Buddhaghosa. You may take my essay as medieval Buddhism presented through modern glasses."[2]

This may have been true enough of the essay in question — the introductory essay to the Compendium. But in his 'Buddhist Philosophy of the Real' he certainly presented theories of his own which aroused considerable controversy at the time. His studies in Western philosophy, to which Mrs Rhys Davids referred, led him to conclude that there were marked affinities between Buddhist thought on the one hand, and Bergson and Bertrand Russell on the other hand. Bergson and Russell — a strange alignment! as Shwe Zan Aung's critics remarked. But Aung saw a comparison between Buddhism and Bergson's concept of durée and also between the Bergsonian and Buddhist emphasis on intuition, while Russell's relational logic resembled, to his mind, Buddhist logic. Both Bergson and Russell are said to have been interested in these comparisons from Burma.[3]

Aung's principal critic was Dr. G.R.T. Ross, who accused Aung of attempting to 'force an identity between the doctrines of these modern writers and Buddhism.' Ross wrote, that passages quoted by Aung himself

[1] Editor's Preface, *The Compendium of Philosophy*, pp. xiii, xiv.

[2] *Compendium of Philosophy:* Note 'On Authority in Buddhist Belief,' p. 283.

[3] Cf. *J.B.R.S.* Vol. VII, Part III, p. 239; Vol. VIII, part III, p. 266.

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showed that the Buddhist 'criterion of reality is permanence, that of unreality is impermanence.'[4] Aung had quoted Buddhaghosa: "There is nothing permanent and constant like Nibbāna". (If Aung can be said to have disregarded this interpretation of Nibbāna in his essay, he certainly did not do so in his Dialogue).

The criticism aroused a spirited reply, including a confession of orthodoxy. "Dr Ross thinks that I am dissatisfied with the present attitude of traditional Buddhism. Buddhist writers are conservative.... Now and again, we may have a controversy amidst our own ranks owing to different interpretations of one and the same passage. But the more I study traditional Buddhism as it has come down to us in writings, the more I have reason to be satisfied with it."[5]

This reply was published in the same year as his Dialogue. It seems clear that he regarded the Dialogue as a fair presentation of Saṃgha discussions. His own view is partly reflected in U Agga's opinions, but he also suggests that these opinions have roots in the past, while Sumana, the exponent of the Ledi school, speaks for more recent opinion. At the same time Sumana voices the objection emphasised by Ross that Nibbāna cannot be conceived as flux.

In the controversy, Aung had an ally in Professor K.M.Ward who emphasised both the reliability and significance of Shwe Zan Aung as an interpreter of Burmese Buddhism. Mrs Rhys Davids, said Ward, was dissatisfied with her own translation of Buddhist psychology. She felt that she had not been able to understand the traditional terms. Hence her collaboration with Aung in the 'Compendium.' "This book revolutionised the methods of Pali research," wrote Ward, "I think it safe to say that no western scholar of repute would now attempt a translation of the all-important Abhidhamma or other technical works without colleborating with someone on the spot — in Burma or Ceylon. U Shwe Zan Aung then inaugurated the new movement. He did not as Dr Ross would have his readers suppose .. give us dogmatically high sounding philosophical terms (whose substitution in the older translations immediately made sense of them). On the contrary he collected a number of definitions, sentences, quotations in which the disputed term appeared: he explained the traditional meanings to his English editor, ... By this means a near modern equivalent to the Buddhist term was generally found... What we want is more of such work."[6]

Besides his close contacts with the Saṃgha scholars, Aung collaborated, too, with another distinguished Pali translator, U Pe Maung Tin. As we have seen, Lēdi Sayādaw was among the scholars he consulted, and Lēdi's own work has had a wide influence on modern Burmese thought. Aung takes note of this, but he distinguishes it from earlier schools. There are grounds, then, for the conclusion that Shwe Zan Aung is himself the more reliable interpreter of the Burmese tradition as a whole.

[4] *J.B.R.S.*, Vol. VIII, Part I, pp. 57ff.
[5] *J.B.R.S.*, Vol. VIII, Part II, pp. 166ff.
[6] *J.B.R.S.*, Vol. VIII, Part III, pp. 263ff.